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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

Letter dated 23 September 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to draw your attention to a matter that has been of grave concern and dissatisfaction to the Government of Sri Lanka.

The section relating to Sri Lanka in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/51/1) presents a biased, dated and accordingly a misleading picture of the situation prevalent in the country.

To place the current events in context it is necessary to refer to the following.

There was a termination of armed attacks consequent on an understanding reached in January 1995 between the Government of Sri Lanka and a secessionist, terrorist group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Despite the earlier history of intransigence of LTTE the Government believed in good faith that a lasting solution to the ongoing conflict could be found through negotiations. The agreement was, however, unilaterally broken in April 1995 by LTTE, which has since then returned to its campaign of calculated terror against civilians and deliberate violence against political, military and economic targets of the State. LTTE remains the only group among the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka that opts to remain outside the pale of the negotiating process that is in progress, for the establishment of peace in the country - a process in which all political parties and groups and the general public are now engaged notwithstanding the complexities involved. Confronted by the continuing resort of LTTE to violence, the Government was obliged to take steps to restore its administration in certain parts of the Northern Province and to dislodge LTTE, which had control over these areas. It is unfortunate that the legitimate action of a Government to resume control over part of its own territory in order

to protect its territorial integrity is made to appear in the report of the Secretary-General as an attempt to "capture" alien soil through an "offensive" that was launched, and thus the cause of the humanitarian problems that have arisen and the reversal of the peace process.

The report then refers to a consequential "large-scale exodus" of people from Jaffna while maintaining a sinister silence concerning two vital facts acknowledged by independent observers, foreign Governments and United Nations agencies themselves:

(a) It was LTTE that forced the so-called exodus of people from Jaffna at gunpoint, not the Government;

(b) With the gradual restoration of the State's administration and conditions of normalcy in the Jaffna district, the vast majority of those forced out by LTTE, numbering over 400,000 persons, have returned to their homes, defying LTTE at considerable risk.

It is also significant that the report fails to mention that such displaced persons are being provided with food and other essential goods and services by the Sri Lanka Government at considerable cost and assistance from several friendly Governments as well as the United Nations and other bodies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and that this is being done despite large quantities being seized and appropriated by LTTE.

While the plight of the displaced persons continues to engage the constant attention of the Government, a major humanitarian disaster has in fact been averted owing to the timely action taken by the Government of Sri Lanka in pursuance of its commitment to promote the welfare of all its people.

The President of Sri Lanka has launched a direct international appeal for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the north and east of the country, which have been the areas most adversely affected by terrorism.

While the institutional support of UNDP for the Government's relief coordination is acknowledged, it must be stressed that the Government of Sri Lanka has not requested the intervention of UNDP or any other United Nations agency for a "reconciliation" programme, which, according to the Secretary-General's report, UNDP had planned.

The Government of Sri Lanka wishes to emphasize its view that the Secretary-General's report should always be factually accurate at the date of its release. It is a matter for regret that this has not been the case with the present report in regard to Sri Lanka.

As a misleading impression of Sri Lanka may be created by the report, I shall be grateful if Your Excellency could take action kindly to have this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 10.

(Signed) H. L. de SILVA
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Sri Lanka to the United Nations